THE EDUCATION OF THE HUMAN RACE

"Hæc omnia inde esse in quibusdam vera, unde in quibusdam falsa sunt."

AUGUSTINE

EDITED BY GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM LESSING

EDITOR'S PREFACE

I have published the first half of this essay in my *Contributions*. Now I am in a position to give the remainder.

The author has set himself upon a high eminence from which he believes it possible to see beyond the limits of the allotted path of his present day's journey.

But he does not call away from his road any wanderer hastening home whose one desire is to reach his night's logding. He does not ask that the view which enchants him should also enchant every other eye.

And so, I would suppose, he may be allowed to stand and wonder where he stands and wonders.

Would that from the immeasurable distance which a soft evening glow neither entirely conceals nor wholly reveals to his gaze, he could bring some guiding hint, for which I have often felt myself at a loss!

This is what is in my mind. Why are we not more willing to see in all positive religions simply the process by which alone human understanding in every place can develop and must still further develop, instead of either ridiculing or becoming angry with them? In the best world there is nothing that deserves this scorn, this indignation we show. Are the religions alone to deserve it? Is God to have part in everything except our mistakes?

THE EDUCATION OF THE HUMAN RACE[1]

1. What education is to the individual man, revelation is to the whole human race.

[1] F. W. Robertson's translation (1858) has been used as the basis of the present version, but has been drastically revised.

2. Education is revelation coming to the individual man; and revelation is education which has come, and is still coming, to the human race.

3. Whether it can be of any advantage to the science of instruction to consider education from this point of view I will not here inquire; but in theology it may unquestionably be of great advantage, and may remove many difficulties, if revelation be conceived of as an education of the human race.

4. Education gives man nothing which he could not also get from within himself; it gives him that which he could get from within himself, only quicker and more easily. In the same way too, revelation gives nothing to the human race which human reason could not arrive at on its own; only it has given, and still gives to it, the most important of these things sooner.

5. And just as in education, it is not a matter of indifference in what order the powers of a man are developed, as it cannot impart to a man everything at once; so also God had to maintain a certain order and a certain measure in his revelation.

6. Even though the first man was furnished at once with a conception of the One God; yet it was not possible that this conception, freely imparted and not won by experience, should subsist long in its clearness. As soon as human reason, left to itself, began to elaborate it, it broke up the one immeasurable into many measurables, and gave a distinguishing mark to every one of these parts.

7. Hence naturally arose polytheism and idolatry. And who can say for how many millions of years human reason would have been lost in these errors, even though at all places and times there were individual men who recognized them *as* errors, had it not pleased God to afford it a better direction by means of a new impulse?

8. But when he neither could, nor would, reveal himself any more to *each* individual man, he selected an individual people for his special education; and that the most rude and the most ferocious, in order to begin with it from the very beginning.

9. This was the Hebrew people, about whom we do not even know what kind of divine worship they had in Egypt. For so despised a race of slaves could not have been permitted to take part in the worship of the Egyptians; and the God of their fathers had become entirely unknown to them.

10. It is possible that the Egyptians had expressly prohibited the Hebrews from having a god or gods, and having destroyed their faith, had brought them to the belief that they had no god or gods whatsoever; that to have a god or gods was the prerogative only of the superior Egyptians; this perhaps in order to be able to tyrannize over them with a greater show of fairness. Do Christians treat their slaves much differently even now?

11. To this rude people God caused himself to be announced at first simply as "the God of their fathers," in order to make them familiar and at home with the idea of a God belonging to them too.

12. Following this, through the miracles with which he led them out of Egypt and planted them in Canaan, he testified of himself to them as a God mightier than any other god.

13. And as he continued demonstrating himself to be the mightiest of all, which only one can be, he gradually accustomed them to the idea of the One.

14. But how far was this conception of the One below the true transcendental conception of the One, which reason, so late, teaches us only to conclude with certainty out of the conception of the infinite!

15. Although the best of the people were already more or less approaching the true conception of the One, the people as a whole could not for a long time elevate themselves to it. And this was the sole reason why they so often abandoned their one God, and expected to find the One, i.e. the mightiest, in some other god belonging to another people.

16. But of what kind of moral education was a people so raw, so incapable of abstract thoughts, and so entirely in their childhood, capable? Of none other but such as is adapted to the age of children, an education by rewards and punishments addressed to the senses.

17. Here too, then, education and revelation come together. As yet God could give to his people no other religion, no other law than one through obedience to which they might hope to be happy, or through disobedience to which they must fear to be unhappy. For as yet they envisaged nothing beyond this life. They knew of no immortality of the soul; they yearned after no life to come. But now to reveal these things, when their reason was so little prepared for them, what would it have been but the same fault in the divine rule as is committed by

the vain schoolmaster who chooses to hurry his pupil too rapidly and boast of his progress, rather than thoroughly to ground him?

18. "But," it will be asked, "to what purpose was this education of so rude a people, a people with whom God had to begin so entirely from the beginning?" I reply: "In order that in the process of time he might all the better employ particular members of this nation as the teachers of all other peoples. He was bringing up in them the future teachers of the human race. These were Jews, these could only be Jews, only men from a people which had been educated in this way."

19. Then further. When the child by dint of blows and caresses had grown and was now come to years of understanding, the Father sent it of a sudden into foreign lands: and here it recognized at once the good which in its Father's house it had possessed, and had not been conscious of.

20. While God guided his chosen people through all the degrees of a child's education, the other nations of the earth had gone on by the light of reason. The most part had remained far behind the chosen people. Only a few had got in front of them. And this, too, takes place with children, who are allowed to grow up on their own; many remain quite raw; some educate themselves to an astonishing degree.

21. But as these more fortunate few prove nothing against the use and necessity of education, so the few heathen nations, who hitherto seemed to be ahead of the chosen people even in the knowledge of God, prove nothing against a revelation. The child of education begins with slow but sure footsteps; it is late in overtaking many a more happily placed child of nature; but it *does* overtake it; and thenceforth can never be overtaken by it again.

22. Similarly—putting aside the doctrine of the unity of God, which in a way is found, and in a way is not found, in the books of the Old Testament—the fact that the doctrine of immortality at least is not to be found in it, but is wholly foreign to it, and all the related doctrine of reward and punishment in a future life, proves just as little against the divine origin of these books. For let us suppose that these doctrines were not only wanting there, but even that they were not even true; let us suppose that for mankind all was over in this life; would the being of God be for this reason less demonstrated? Would God on this account be less at liberty, would it less become him, to take immediate charge of the temporal fortunes of any people out of this perishable

race? The miracles which he performed for the Jews, the prophecies which he caused to be recorded through them, were surely not for the few mortal Jews, in whose time they happened and were recorded: his intentions there concerned the whole Jewish people, the entire human race, who, perhaps, are destined to remain for ever here on earth, even though every individual Jew and every individual man dies and is gone for ever.

23. Once more, the absence of those doctrines in the writings of the Old Testament proves nothing against their divinity. Moses was sent from God even though the sanction of his law extended only to this life. For why should it extend further? He was surely sent only to the Israelitish people, to the Israelitish people *of that time*, and his commission was perfectly adapted to the knowledge, capacities, inclinations of the *then existing* Israelitish people, as well as to the destiny of the people that was to come. And this is sufficient.

24. So far ought Warburton to have gone, and no further. But that learned man overdrew his bow. Not content that the absence of these doctrines did not *discredit* the divine mission of Moses, it must even be a *proof* to him of the divinity of the mission. If he had only sought this proof in the suitability of such a law for such a people!

But he took refuge in the hypothesis of a miraculous system continued in an unbroken line from Moses to Christ, according to which God had made every individual Jew just as happy or unhappy as his obedience or disobedience to the law deserved. This miraculous system, he said, had compensated for the lack of those doctrines [of eternal rewards and punishments] without which no state can subsist; and precisely this compensation proved what that lack at first sight appeared to deny.

25. How well it was that Warburton could by no argument prove or even make likely this continuous miracle, in which he placed the essence of the Israelitish theocracy! For could he have done so, then indeed, but not until then, he would have made the difficulty really insuperable, for me at least. For the truth which the divinity of Moses' mission was to restore, would, in fact, have been actually made doubtful by it: a truth which God, it is true, did not at that time want to reveal; but which, on the other hand, he certainly did not wish to make harder of attainment.

26. I will illustrate by something that is a counterpart to the process of revelation. A primer for children may fairly pass over in silence this or that important piece of the science or art which it expounds, when the teacher considers that it is not yet suitable for the capabilities of the children for whom he was writing. But it must contain absolutely nothing which bars the way to the knowledge which is held back, or which misleads the children away from it. Rather, all the approaches towards it must be carefully left open; and to lead them away from even one of these approaches, or to cause them to enter it later than they need, would alone be enough to change the mere imperfection of the primer into an actual fault.

27. In the same way, in the writings of the Old Testament, those primers for the Israelitish people, rough, unpractised in thought as they are, the doctrines of the immortality of the soul, and future recompense, might be fairly left out: but they were bound to contain nothing which could even have delayed the progress of the people for whom they were written, in their way to this great truth. And what, to say the least, could have delayed them more than the promise of such a miraculous recompense in this life—promised by him who makes no promise that he does not keep?

28. For even if the strongest proof of the immortality of the soul and of a life to come were not to be alleged from the inequality of the distribution of the material rewards in this life, in which so little account appears to be taken of virtue and vice; yet it is at least certain that without this difficulty—to be resolved in the life to come—human reason would still be far from any better and firmer proofs, and perhaps even would never have reached them. For what was to impel it to seek for these better proofs? Mere curiosity?

29. An Israelite here and there, no doubt, might have extended to every individual member of the entire state those promises and threatenings which applied to it as a whole, and been firmly persuaded that whosoever is pious must also be happy, and that whoever was unhappy must be bearing the penalty of his wrong-doing, which penalty would at once change itself into blessing, as soon as he abandoned his sin. One like this appears to have written Job, for the plan of it is entirely in this spirit.

30. But it was impossible that daily experience should confirm this conviction, or else it would have been all over, for ever, with the

people who had this experience, so far as all recognition and reception were concerned of the truth as yet unfamiliar to them. For if the pious man were absolutely happy, and it was also a necessary part of his happiness that his satisfaction should be broken by no uneasy thoughts of death, and that he should die old and "full of days"[1]: how could he yearn for another life? and how could he reflect upon a thing for which he did not yearn? But if the pious did not reflect on it, who then should reflect? The transgressor? he who felt the punishment of his misdeeds, and if he cursed this life must have so gladly renounced that other existence?

31. It was of much less consequence that an Israelite here and there should directly and expressly have denied the immortality of the soul and future recompense, on the grounds that the law had no reference to it. The denial of an individual, had it even been a Solomon,[2] did not arrest the progress of the common reason, and was in itself, even, a proof that the nation had now taken a great step nearer to the truth. For individuals only deny what the many are thinking over; and to think over an idea about which before no one troubled himself in the least, is half-way to knowledge.

32. Let us also acknowledge that it is a heroic obedience to obey the laws of God simply because they are God's laws, and not because he has promised to reward those who obey them now and hereafter; to obey them even though there be an entire despair of future recompense, and uncertainty respecting a temporal one.

33. Must not a people educated in this heroic obedience towards God be destined, must they not be capable beyond all others of executing divine purposes of quite a special character? Let the soldier, who pays blind obedience to his leader, also become convinced of his leader's wisdom, and then say what that leader may not venture to do with his aid.

34. As yet the Jewish people had worshipped in their Jehovah rather the mightiest than the wisest of all gods; as yet they had rather feared him as a jealous God than loved him: this, too, is a proof that the conceptions which they had of their eternal One God were not exactly the right conceptions which we should have of God. However, now the time was come for these conceptions of theirs to be expanded,

[1] Cf. Genesis xxv. 8; xxxv. 29.
[2] Ecclesiastes iii. 19–21.

ennobled, rectified, to accomplish which God availed himself of a perfectly natural means, a better and more correct measure, by which they got the opportunity of appreciating him.

35. Instead of, as hitherto, appreciating him in contrast with the miserable idols of the small neighbouring peoples, with whom they lived in constant rivalry, they began, in captivity under the wise Persians, to measure him against the "Being of all Beings" such as a more disciplined reason recognized and worshipped.

36. Revelation had guided their reason, and now, all at once, reason gave clearness to their revelation.

37. This was the first reciprocal influence which these two (reason and revelation) exercised on one another; and so far is such a mutual influence from being unbecoming to the author of them both, that without it either of them would have been useless.

38. The child, sent into foreign lands, saw other children who knew more, who lived more becomingly, and asked itself, in confusion, "Why do I not know that too? Why do I not live so too? Ought I not to have learnt and acquired all this in my Father's house?" Thereupon it again sought out its primer, which had long been thrown into a corner, in order to push the blame on to the primer. But behold, it discovers that the blame does not rest upon books, but the blame is solely its own, for not having long ago known this very thing, and lived in this very way.

39. Since the Jews, by this time, through the medium of the pure Persian doctrine, recognized in their Jehovah not simply the greatest of all national deities, but God; and since they could the more readily find him and show him to others in their sacred writings, inasmuch as he was really in them; and since they manifested as great an aversion for sensuous representations, or at all events were shown in these Scriptures as possessing an aversion as great as the Persians had always felt; it is not surprising that they found favour in the eyes of Cyrus with a divine worship which he recognized as being, no doubt, far below pure Sabeism, but yet far above the rude idolatries which in its stead had taken possession of the land of the Jews.

40. Thus enlightened respecting the treasures which they had possessed without knowing it, they returned, and became quite another people, whose first care it was to give permanence to this enlightenment amongst themselves. Soon apostasy and idolatry among them was out

of the question. For it is possible to be faithless to a national deity, but never to God, after he has once been recognized.

41. The theologians have tried to explain this complete change in the Jewish people in different ways; and one, who has well demonstrated the insufficiency of these explanations, wanted finally to give, as the true reason—"the visible fulfilment of the prophecies which had been spoken and written respecting the Babylonian captivity and the restoration from it." But even this reason can only be true in so far as it presupposes the exalted ideas of God as they now are. The Jews must now, for the first time, have recognized that to do miracles and to predict the future belonged only to God, both of which powers they had formerly ascribed also to false idols; this precisely is the reason why miracles and prophecies had hitherto made so weak and fleeting an impression upon them.

42. Doubtless the Jews became better acquainted with the doctrine of immortality among the Chaldeans and Persians. They became more familiar with it, too, in the schools of the Greek philosophers in Egypt.

43. However, as this doctrine did not correspond with their Scriptures in the same way that the doctrines of God's unity and attributes had done—since the former were entirely overlooked by that sensual people, while the latter would be sought for: and since too, for the former, previous exercising was necessary, and as yet there had been only *hints* and *allusions*, the faith in the immortality of the soul could naturally never be the faith of the entire people. It was and continued to be only the creed of a certain section of them.

44. An example of what I mean by "previous exercising" in the doctrines of immortality, is the divine threat of punishing the misdeeds of the father upon his children unto the third and fourth generation. This accustomed the fathers to live in thought with their remotest posterity, and to feel in advance the misfortunes which they had brought upon these innocents.

45. What I mean by an "allusion" is something which might merely excite curiosity, or call forth a question. As, for instance, the common figure of speech which describes death by "he was gathered to his fathers."

46. By a "hint" I mean something which contains some sort of germ, from which the truth which up to now has been held back, may be developed. Of this character was the inference of Christ from God's

title as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."[1] This hint appears to me to be undoubtedly capable of development into a strong proof.

47. In such exercises, allusions, hints, consists the *positive* perfection of a primer; just as the above-mentioned quality of not putting difficulties or hindrances in the way to the truths that have been withheld, constitutes its *negative* perfection.

48. Add to all this the clothing and the style.

(1) The clothing of abstract truths which could scarcely be passed

He had, however, only wished to embrace in such a plan that part of the human race which by language, habits, government, and other natural and political relationships, was already united in itself.

55. That is, this portion of the human race had come so far in the exercise of its reason, as to need, and to be able to make use of, nobler and worthier motives for moral action than temporal rewards and punishments, which had hitherto been its guides. The child has become a youth. Sweetmeats and toys have given place to an awakening desire to be as free, as honoured, and as happy as its elder brother.

56. For a long time, already, the best individuals of that portion of the human race had been accustomed to let themselves be ruled by the shadow of such nobler motives. The Greek and Roman did everything to live on after this life, even if it were only in the memories of their fellow-citizens.

57. It was time that another *true* life to be expected after this one should gain an influence over the youth's actions.

58. And so Christ was the first *reliable, practical* teacher of the immortality of the soul.

59. The first *reliable* teacher. Reliable, by reason of the prophecies which were fulfilled in him; reliable by reason of the miracles which he achieved; reliable by reason of his own revival after a death by which he had put the seal to his teaching. Whether we can still *prove* this revival, these miracles, I put aside, as I leave on one side *who* the person of Christ was. All *that* may have been at that time of great importance for the first acceptance of his teaching, but it is now no longer of the same importance for the recognition of the *truth* of his teaching.[1]

60. The first *practical* teacher. For it is one thing to conjecture, to wish, and to believe in the immortality of the soul, as a philosophic speculation: quite another thing to direct one's inner and outer actions in accordance with it.

61. And this at least Christ was the first to teach. For although, before him, the belief had already been introduced among many nations, that bad actions have yet to be punished in the life to come; yet they were only such actions as were injurious to civil society, and which had, therefore, already had their punishment in civil society too. To preach an inward purity of heart in reference to another life, was reserved for him alone.

[1] Cf. the end of *On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power.*

62. His disciples have faithfully propagated this teaching: and even if they had had no other merit than that of having effected a more general publication among other nations of a truth which Christ had appeared to have destined for the Jews alone,[1] yet if only on that account, they would have to be reckoned among the benefactors and fosterers of the human race.

63. If, however, they mixed up this one great truth together with other doctrines whose truth was less enlightening, whose usefulness was less considerable, how could it be otherwise? Let us not blame them for this, but rather seriously examine whether these very commingled doctrines have not become a new directing impulse for human reason.

64. At least, it is already clear from our experience that the New Testament Scriptures, in which these doctrines after some time were found preserved, have afforded, and still afford, the second, better primer for the race of man.

65. For seventeen hundred years past they have occupied human reason more than all other books, and enlightened it more, were it even only through the light which human reason itself put into them.

66. It would have been impossible for any other book to become so generally known among such different nations: and indisputably, the fact that modes of thought so completely diverse from each other have turned their attention to this same book, has assisted human reason on its way more than if every nation had had its *own* primer specially for itself.

67. It was also most necessary that each people should for a time consider this book as the *non plus ultra* of their knowledge. For the youth must believe his primer to be the first of all books, so that his impatience to be finished with it may not hurry him on to things for which he has not yet laid the foundations.

68. And that is also of the greatest importance now. You who are cleverer than the rest, who wait fretting and impatient on the last page of the primer, take care! Take care that you do not let your weaker classmates notice what you are beginning to scent, or even see!

69. Until these weaker fellows of yours have caught up with you, it is better that you should return once more to this primer, and examine

[1] Here the influence of Reimarus is apparent. Coleridge's marginal comment is: "How was it possible that Lessing could assert this in the face of 'Go ye into all nations'? Cf. the discourse with the Samaritan woman etc. etc."

whether that which you take only for variations of method, for superfluous verbiage in the teaching, is not perhaps something more.

70. You have seen in the childhood of the human race, in the doctrine of the unity of God, that God makes immediate revelations of mere truths of reason, or has permitted and caused pure truths of reason to be taught, for a time, as truths of immediate revelation, in order to promulgate them the more rapidly, and ground them the more firmly.

71. You learn in the childhood of the human race the same thing, in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. It is *preached* in the second, better primer as revelation, not *taught* as a result of human reason.

72. As we by this time can dispense with the Old Testament for the doctrine of the unity of God, and as we are gradually beginning also to be less dependent on the New Testament for the doctrine of the immortality of the soul: might there not be mirrored in this book also other truths of the same kind, which we are to gaze at in awe as revelations, just until reason learns to deduce them from its other demonstrated truths, and to connect them with them?

73. For instance, the doctrine of the Trinity. How if this doctrine should in the end, after countless waverings to one side or the other, merely bring human reason on the path to recognizing that God cannot possibly be One in the sense in which finite things are one, that even his unity must be a transcendental unity which does not exclude a sort of plurality? Must not God at least have the most perfect conception of himself, i.e. a conception which contains everything which is in him? But would everything be contained in it which is in him, if it contained merely a conception, merely the possibility even of his necessary reality, as well as of his other qualities? This possibility exhausts the being of his other qualities. Does it exhaust that of his necessary reality? I think not. Consequently either God can have no perfect conception of himself at all, or this perfect conception is just as necessarily real (i.e. actually existent) as he himself is. Admittedly the image of myself in the mirror is nothing but an empty representation of me, because it only has that of me which is reflected by rays of light falling on its surface. If, however, this image contained everything, everything without exception, which is contained in me, would it then still be a mere empty representation, or not rather a true double of myself? When I believe that I recognize in God a similar reduplication,

I perhaps do not so much err, as that my language is insufficient for my ideas: and so much at least remains for ever incontrovertible, that those who want to make the idea acceptable to the popular intelligence could scarcely have expressed themselves in a more apt and comprehensible form than by giving the name of a Son whom God begets from eternity.[1]

74. And the doctrine of original sin. How if finally everything were to convince us that man, standing on the first and lowest step of his humanity, is by no means so much master of his actions that he is *able* to obey moral laws?

75. And the doctrine of the Son's satisfaction. How if everything finally compelled us to assume that God, in spite of that original incapacity of man, chose rather to give him moral laws, and forgive him all transgressions in consideration of his Son, i.e. in consideration of the living embodiment of all his own perfections, compared with which, and in which, all imperfections of the individual disappear, than *not* to give him those laws, and thus to exclude him from all moral bliss, which cannot be conceived of without moral laws?

76. Let it not be objected that speculations of this nature upon the mysteries of religion are forbidden. The word mystery signified, in the first age of Christianity, something quite different from what it means now: and the development of revealed truths into truths of reason, is absolutely necessary, if the human race is to be assisted by them. When they were revealed they were certainly not truths of reason, but they were revealed in order to become such. They were like the "facit" said to his boys by the mathematics master; he goes on ahead of them in order to indicate to some extent the lines they should follow in their sums. If the scholars were to be satisfied with the "facit," they would never learn to do sums, and would frustrate the intention with which their good master gave them a guiding clue in their work.

77. And why should not we too, by means of a religion whose historical truth, if you will, looks dubious, be led in a similar way to closer and better conceptions of the divine Being, of our own nature, of our relation to God, which human reason would never have reached on its own?

78. It is not true that speculations upon these things have ever done

[1] For the argument see *The Christianity of Reason*, (below, p. 99). Here Lessing says nothing of the Spirit.

harm or been injurious to civil society. Reproach is due, not to these speculations, but to the folly and tyranny which tried to keep them in bondage; a folly and tyranny which would not allow men to develop their own thoughts.

79. On the contrary, though they may in individual instances be found wanting, speculations of this sort are unquestionably the most fitting exercises of the human reason that exist, just as long as the human heart, as such, is capable to the highest degree of loving virtue for its eternal blessed consequences.

80. For this selfishness of the human heart, which wishes to exercise its understanding only on that which concerns our bodily needs, succeeds in blunting rather than in sharpening it. It is absolutely necessary for it to be exercised on spiritual objects, if it is to attain its perfect illumination, and bring out that purity of heart which makes us capable of loving virtue for its own sake alone.

81. Or is the human species never to arrive at this highest step of illumination and purity?—Never?

82. Never?—Let me not think this blasphemy, All Merciful! Education has its goal, in the race, no less than in the individual. That which is educated is educated for a purpose.

83. The flattering prospects which are opened to the youth, the honour and well-being which are held out to him, what are they more than means of educating him to become a man, who, when these prospects of honour and well-being have vanished, shall be able to do his *duty*?

84. This is the aim of *human* education, and does the divine education not extend as far? Is nature not to succeed with the whole, as art succeeded with the individual? Blasphemy! Blasphemy!

85. No! It will come! it will assuredly come! the time of the perfecting, when man, the more convinced his understanding feels about an ever better future, will nevertheless not need to borrow motives for his actions from this future; for he will do right because it *is* right, not because arbitrary rewards are set upon it, which formerly were intended simply to fix and strengthen his unsteady gaze in recognizing the inner, better, rewards of well-doing.

86. It will assuredly come! the time of a new eternal gospel, which is promised us in the primers of the New Covenant itself![1]

[1] Revelation xiv. 6.

87. Perhaps even some enthusiasts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had caught a glimmer of this new eternal gospel, and only erred in that they predicted its arrival as so near to their own time.

88. Perhaps their "Three Ages of the World" were not so empty a speculation after all, and assuredly they had no bad intentions when they taught that the new covenant must become as antiquated as the old has become. There remained with them the same economy of the same God. Ever, to put my own expression into their mouths, ever the selfsame plan of the education of the human race.

89. Only they were premature. They believed that they could make their contemporaries, who had scarcely outgrown their childhood, without enlightenment, without preparation, at one stroke men worthy of their *third age*.

90. And it was just this which made them enthusiasts. The enthusiast often casts true glances into the future, but for this future he cannot wait. He wants this future to come quickly, and to be made to come quickly through him. A thing over which nature takes thousands of years is to come to maturity just at the moment of his experience. For what part has he in it, if that which he recognizes as the best does not become the best in his lifetime? Does he come again? Does he expect to come again? It is strange that this enthusiasm is not more the fashion, if it were only among enthusiasts.

91. Go thine inscrutable way, Eternal Providence! Only let me not despair of thee because of this inscrutableness. Let me not despair of thee, even if thy steps appear to me to be going backward. It is not true that the shortest line is always straight.

92. Thou hast on thine eternal way so much that thou must concern thyself with, so much to attend to! And what if it were as good as proved that the great, slow wheel, which brings mankind nearer to its perfection, is only set in motion by smaller, faster wheels, each of which contributes its own individual part to the whole?

93. It is so! Must every individual man—one sooner, another later—have travelled along the very same path by which the race reaches its perfection? Have travelled along it in one and the same life? Can he have been, in one and the selfsame life, a sensual Jew and a spiritual Christian? Can he in the selfsame life have overtaken both?

94. Surely not that! But why should not every individual man have been present more than once in this world?

95. Is this hypothesis so laughable merely because it is the oldest? Because human understanding, before the sophistries of the Schools had dissipated and weakened it, lighted upon it at once?

96. Why may not even I have already performed all those steps towards my perfection which merely temporal penalties and rewards can bring man to?

97. And, once more, why not all those steps, to perform which the prospects of eternal rewards so powerfully assist us?

98. Why should I not come back as often as I am capable of acquiring new knowledge, new skills? Do I bring away so much from one visit that it is perhaps not worth the trouble of coming again?

99. Is this a reason against it? Or, because I forget that I have been here already? Happy is it for me that I do forget. The recollection of my former condition would permit me to make only a bad use of the present. And that which I must forget *now*, is that necessarily forgotten for ever?

100. Or is it a reason against the hypothesis that so much time would have been lost to me? Lost?—And what then have I to lose?—Is not the whole of eternity mine?